

Commentary

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America can't afford to delay any longer in Iraq

By Betty McCollum

Attacks are escalating. Casualties of U.S. personnel and innocent Iraqis are rising. Diplomats and international aid workers are leaving. This is not even a picture of normal life. It is not even a picture of a fledgling democracy. It is a picture of a war zone. Where is the White House plan to restore stability and transfer power back to the 25 million people of Iraq?

The only surprise in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was the speed with which it occurred. No one doubted the superiority of our highly-trained U.S. servicemen and women. Now, six months after the president declared victory in Iraq and the country became a U.S. protectorate, the surprise is that the White House still lacks a plan to protect Iraq. In discussions with U.S. troops, coalition leadership and the Iraqi Governing Council, it became clear to me that their initial optimism has been tempered by the escalating violence and the monumental challenges of simultaneously constructing physical as well as political infrastructure. Iraq is a war zone with violent, deadly

"HAVE FAITH, MEN..."
"THE MEDIA'S JUST
MAGNIFYING
THE PROBLEM!"

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could lose the election." These two contrasting statements offer insight about the gap between the reality in Iraq and the rhetoric from the White House. This gap is as wide as the very distance between Washington and Baghdad. I saw an attempt by U.S. will do any job I am asked to do, but what is my mission? Am I a soldier, a policeman or a humanitarian worker?" A very different concern was voiced recently by a Bush administration National Security Council officer in Newsweek: "If we don't get Iraq right in time, we

will do any job I am asked to do, but what is my mission? Am I a soldier, a policeman or a humanitarian worker?" A very different concern was voiced recently by a Bush administration National Security Council officer in Newsweek: "If we don't get Iraq right in time, we

ment in Iraq will be. Will U.S. troops remain in Iraq for one year, or two years? Or have we embarked upon a generational military presence similar to our ongoing commitments in Germany, Japan and South Korea? Sadly, the failure to communicate honestly with Congress and the American people is the hallmark of the Bush administration's Iraq policy. The truth has too frequently been subjugated by political sound bites to explain the ever-changing rationale for preemptive war and the unrealistic postwar assumptions. Now we hear the absurd logic that the upsurge in attacks against civilians and troops are a sign of U.S. progress.

We cannot afford to delay any longer in Iraq. As the international community withdraws from Iraq and U.S. casualties occur daily, Congress, the American people and, especially, our troops need to hear a realistic plan from the White House for success in Iraq. The status quo is no longer tolerable.

Betty McCollum, D-Minn., traveled with a delegation of House International Relations Committee members to Iraq, Jordan and Turkey last month.

The White House and Pentagon have been completely unwilling to tell the American people what the duration and extent of our military committ-